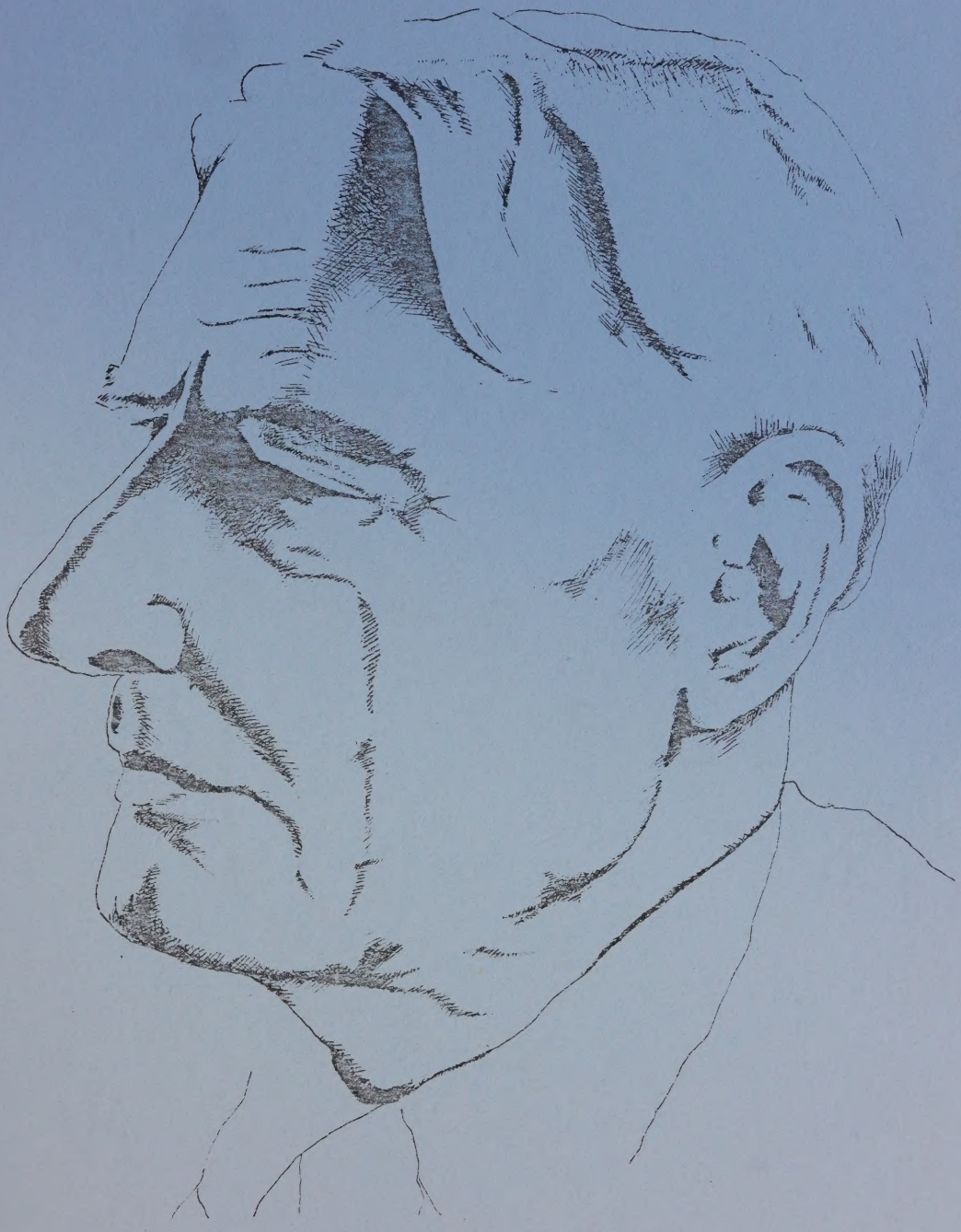
Grand Man: Norman Douglas 1868-1952



Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library · September 27 - October 30, 1982

GRAND MAN

NORMAN DOUGLAS

1868-1952

An exhibition held at the Thomas Fisher

Rare Book Library

University of Toronto

September 27 - October 30, 1982

PREFACE

It is now 65 years since Norman Douglas wrote South Wind. This clean-struck homer of 1917 buoyantly mocked conventional morality, then a compound of religious, sexual, nationalistic and political cant harmful to human felicity. Douglas' Rabelaisian wit describing life on a fictitious Mediterranean island called Nepenthe, a drug Ulysses and his companions took to forget their grief, still educates and enchants. Those with well-filled minds, or those envious of well-filled minds, are mulish to neglect reading South Wind and Old Calabria, a Douglas travel book of polished individualism Martin Secker published in 1915 and long considered, after Doughty's Arabia Deserta, the finest in the English language. An Edmund Wilson letter paying tribute to Old Calabria forms part of this exhibition.

Men of talent like Douglas (Hazlitt for example) whose temper of mind is pragmatic, many-sided erudition large and prose enviably vigorous, invariably suffer from snappish muckrakers, even after death - disproving the common opinion that death quashes jealousy and malice. Douglas, who died in 1952, has suffered and continues to suffer peevish prejudice. Richard Aldington's Pinorman (1954) is a churlish debunking of Norman Douglas, a pièce de résistance of distorted facts and mean-mouthed mendacity. In the recently published Aldington/Lawrence Durrell correspondence, Literary Lifelines (1981), Aldington brays contemptuously that South Wind is only a kind of opéra bouffe agreeably truffled with scandal, apparently *forgetting that such diversions have produced a rich crop of masterpieces, including Mozart's divine Le Nozze di Figaro.*

Even the urbane Robertson Davies trilled 'the unspeakable Norman Douglas' in a recent article - without explaining why. Unsubstantiated remarks of this sort suggest hubris in an author whose next novel was to be as dispiritingly kinky as The Rebel Angels. Did the adjective 'unspeakable' refer to an attack with a walking stick Douglas made on his grandmother at the age of 12, his ribald book Some Limericks (1928), or his interest in children? We are not told. When Douglas died Graham Greene wrote: "He was a man of great personal dignity and of great charity in the theological sense; he had a love too great to be other than tolerant of the strange foibles of his fellow men." Greene also added that Douglas was "a great writer and a great man."

Editors are rarely impartial; biased obituaries or inept reviews make admirable denigratory tools. When Martin Secker died in 1978 a lengthy obituary in The Times left Douglas unmentioned, though one of the two most distinguished authors Secker ever published, the other being D.H. Lawrence. It was unjust to Secker, a magnanimous man who showed compassion when vexed by the asperities of writers, for his obituarist to slight Douglas in this way. That Douglas could be peremptory about royalties is evident in a letter (1926) written to Secker included in this exhibition's memorabilia. The chuckleheaded review of Mark Holloway's magisterial biography of Douglas (1976) printed in The Times, to use the delightful language of Alabama, scared the mules of all Douglas scholars.

Douglas served as a third secretary (1894-6) in the British Embassy at St. Petersburg. Yet critics have always been puzzled how he learned to write so well, choosing to ignore the long tradition of good writing obligatory in European

chancelleries. *Are Chateaubriand, Claudel, Maurice Baring, Duff Cooper and Harold Nicolson, diplomats all, unread in these dysphasic times? Critics also liken Douglas to Petronius, but of the classical authors he most resembles Horace. Boswell was not contradicted by Dr. Johnson when he said that you could find everything in Horace except religion. Beauty, wit, naughtiness, piety of the proper sort, detestation of vulgarity, condemnation of cant and humbug, abound in Horace, as they do in Norman Douglas. His twenty-odd widely-ranging books are suffused with a refreshing curiosa felicitas that stimulates the mind, effectively routing those neuroses and inhibitions which crimp modern life.*

Norman Douglas is assured of survival. Luffing before the timeless winds and ever-beckoning shores of Mediterranean thought, his prose an enrichment of English literature, the 'jovial immoderation and frolicsome perversity' of South Wind's fabulous Nepenthe will, like The Pickwick Papers, sail on right merrily. Douglas had loved Italy since his first visit in 1888, and lies buried on Capri. "I do not wish to live in Italy," Douglas told an official bent on thwarting his return to that country in 1946, "I wish to die there." He did, of erysipelas, aged 83, ending the long pain of this frightful and incurable skin disease with an overdose of sleeping pills. Did not Seneca say that "in no matter more than in death should we act according to our own desire"? Douglas wrote in his An Almanac (1941) for February 9: "Why prolong life save to prolong pleasure?"; prophetically, for on February 9 eleven years later the Great Severance occurred.

J.L. Sanderson
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INTRODUCTION

He is not so well known now - not as well as he should be - yet during his life time, he was acknowledged as a master prose writer, capable of turning even the driest information into a pleasing passage.

George Norman Douglass, better known as Norman Douglas, the author of such classics as Old Calabria and South Wind, was a man of many parts and many friends, a frequent traveller and a prolific writer. Novelist, geologist, botanist, essayist, but above all, a superb writer of travel books, he defies being placed in any one category.

His travel books overflow with information and yet are never heavy or pedantic. We soon realize we are in the company of a very witty and erudite man, who passes on the information he wants us to have in a painless manner. His forceful personality shows itself in almost every passage.

The novels are light and fanciful, yet here too we are informed, be it about Breton legends (They Went) or his philosophy of life as expressed in South Wind.

In his younger years he was a scientist, and when he became a professional writer, he did not turn away from studying those things he found of interest. He was continually studying, but was no friend of universal education, believing it only produced standardized types. And this is why he found children so delightful. As he writes in Alone "They are not standardized. They are more generous, more impersonal. Their curiosity is disinterested ... A child is ready to embrace the universe ..." How well this describes Douglas himself! He too was ever ready to embrace the universe and showed it in the variety of subjects he covered in his works.

Luba Hussel
August 1982

Cover by Thomas Reid

The Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library wishes to acknowledge the generous co-operation of John Leslie Sanderson, of Niagara-on-the-Lake, who so kindly made available material from his own extensive Douglas collection. This guide is based in large part on Mark Holloway's Norman Douglas: a Biography (London, 1976)

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CASE I

THE EARLY YEARS

George Norman Douglas was born on the feast day of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary, December 8, 1868. It was the day that Douglas considered the most appropriate "for the debut of someone as pure and irreproachable in thought and deed as himself ..." This happy event took place in the Austrian Vorarlberg, where his Scottish father managed the textile mills which had been in the Douglass family for the past two generations. When Douglas was six, his father was killed in a hunting accident, and three years later the lad was sent away to school in England. This proved disastrous. Douglas was terribly unhappy, and when his older brother John was due to return home, the young Douglas wrote his mother threatening to arrange for his expulsion, unless she allowed him to return also. The ultimatum worked and in the fall of 1883, Douglas entered the Gymnasium at Karlsruhe. Here he was able to relax and learn; here he discovered new interests. Many branches of science aroused his curiosity. By the time he was seventeen (1886) his first scientific paper On the Variation of Plumage in the Corvidae had been published (The Zoologist, February). But his new scientific interests did not interfere with other occupations; he was able to find the time to learn Russian and Italian, become a very good pianist, go to dancing school, act in school plays, read a great many books, and, if we are to believe his memoirs, keep happy at least three mistresses.

By the end of 1886, two more articles had appeared in the same periodical: On the Variation of Colour in the European Squirrel (November) and The Present Distribution of the Beaver in Europe (December). These were very short papers, notes almost, but within three years, he produced a long article on a local species of frogs, Der Moorfrosch, Rana Arvalis, bei Karlsruhe, which appeared in the July 1889 issue of Der Zoologische Garten.

July 1889 also marked the end of his six years at the Gymnasium, and the young scientist now decided to make his career in the British Foreign Service. Not willing to enter Cambridge or Oxford, since - to cite Douglas - these institutions only served to stultify the mind, he embarked on a four year course of preparation for the rigorous entrance examination. At least two years were spent at a "cramming" establishment in London, but Douglas still found time to take side trips to Paris - in order to study the language, political economy and constitutional history, to return to Karlsruhe to take part in a scientific expedition, and to visit the Shetlands and Orkneys as well as the Mediterranean islands of Vulcano and Santorini. The trip to Santorini took place in 1892, when he found it prudent to leave London for a while because of Cora, a girl who sold hats. His amatory problems did not cloud his scientific eye, and this trip provided him with the material to write the article which appeared in the December 12, 1892 issue of Der Zoologischer Anzeiger entitled Zur Fauna Santorins.

Early the next year, he wrote and passed his Foreign Service examination, and after spending one year in Whitehall, was posted to the British Embassy at St. Petersburg. He spent the next two and a half years there; the time being made more pleasant by numerous love affairs and trips to Finland and the Middle East. More scientific publications appeared, including On the Herpetology of

the Grand Duchy of Baden, and On the Darwinian Hypothesis of Sexual Selection, the paper that Douglas referred to as his "only valuable contribution to scientific thought". In this long paper he argues that decorative colouration, courtship displays and exhibitions of prowess are not meant to please the female of the species, but are rather products of excess vitality. Further on he opines that leisure is the prerequisite of all artistic activity and appreciation; that, since animals are too preoccupied in struggling to survive, only the higher form of animal life (human beings) can produce or appreciate art; and that this is best done in southern climes, where survival is easier. But these two papers are not as well known as another, written as a result of his Middle Eastern trip. This is the Report on the Pumice Stone Industry of the Lipari Islands; a fine example of what can be done with a technical subject to make it both intelligible and interesting. One senses the author's lively curiosity and trained eye for detail, and these combined with a skillful use of words make this somewhat dry subject come alive. The Report caused a great deal of resentment in the trade, as it was the first time anyone had revealed the true price of the stone. As well, his facts about the child porters caused an inspector to be sent from London, with the result that a mechanical conveyer was soon installed. As Douglas later reported, it was the only meritorious act of his life. A typical Douglas exaggeration.

These papers marked the end of his scientific publications. It was not that he withdrew from research, rather that he had begun to enjoy writing for its own sake and was thinking about a career as a full-time writer.

The end of his diplomatic career came soon after that. The reasons for his suddenly asking to be placed "en disponibilité" in October 1896 are now obscure; a certain Helen may have played an important role. In any event Douglas found it prudent to leave quickly - one of the many lightning departures that became so much a part of his life.

Books exhibited include:

Douglas, Norman. On the Variation of Plumage in the Corvidae. Contained in the February 1886 issue of the Zoologist.

Zur Fauna Santorins. Extracted from the December 1892 issue of Der Zoologischer Anzeiger.

On the Herpetology of the Grand Duchy of Baden. London, Adams, 1894.

Contributions to an Avifauna of Baden. Reprint from the May, 1894 issue of the Zoologist.

On the Darwinian Hypothesis of Sexual Selection. Reprint from November and December, 1895 issue of Natural Science.

Report on the Pumice Stone Industry of the Lipari Islands. London, H.M.S.O., 1895.

CASE II

FIRST LITERARY EFFORTS

Douglas had had no need to supplement his income with a position in the Foreign Service, so that being placed "en disponibilité" put no strain on his resources. Travel took up much of his time: London, Paris, Capri and his native Vorarlberg were visited during the next year. He also purchased a villa in Posilipo, a suburb of Naples, and spent a good deal of his time in renovating the house and improving the garden. At the end of 1897 Douglas took a trip to India, of which nothing tangible remains; not why he went, nor where, nor how long he stayed; all we have are impressions later recorded in How About Europe? (1929).

By this time he was twenty-nine and perhaps feeling the lack of domesticity, he decided to marry - rather quickly. His bride was an Austrian-Irish first cousin, a childhood friend. It has been suggested that their friendship grew into intimacy before the marriage, since a scant nine months elapsed between their marriage on June 25, 1898 and the birth of their first child, Archie, the following February. But one must wonder why Douglas, who had always found it so easy to "evaporate" whenever a situation became sticky, did not do so in this instance. Whatever the reason, Elsa Fitzgibbon and Norman Douglas eloped to England and, after a honeymoon on Ischia, returned to the Villa Maya in Posilipo. The house was to see very little of them, as they spent a great deal of time travelling: Tunisia in 1899, India and Ceylon in 1900. In between trips, they managed to find the time to produce another child, Robin, and to work on a book of short stories.

Unprofessional Tales was published in September 1901 under their joint pseudonym, Normyx, for which Douglas in later life was most grateful. He was not proud of these stories; though, being of an economical nature, he was not slow to rework and republish them whenever he needed money in his later years. Some twenty years later he was to write "Not a single one of these things was written by myself; they are all by my wife who had an extraordinary (Irish) faculty - I wish I had it - for inventing plots and poems and things; but every one of them was retouched by myself". Some seven years after that statement, he admitted writing one of the stories, Nerinda, and the little anacreontic poem, both of which saw later and separate publication.

By 1902, Douglas was visiting Capri for prolonged periods. The marriage was, de facto, over and Douglas, alone on Capri, began to concentrate on his research. The end of the marriage coincided with the death of his mother, Vanda, in Munich and it has been suggested that she was the chief force behind Douglas marrying, and now with her death, there was no longer a reason to continue to stay together. Douglas is silent on this, though not about the resentment he felt toward Elsa, referring to her throughout his life with some bitterness, usually ending his comments with a typical sardonic "Ha!"

The divorce was heard on March 18, 1904 in London and entitled Norman "to live single or to marry any free woman as if he had never been married ... and entitled to the custody and keeping of Louis Archibald Douglass and Robert Sholto Douglass the children of the marriage". Custody was given to Douglas because Elsa had been found guilty of adultery with Baron von Stengel.

After the divorce he returned to Capri and his studies. He tried to get some of his articles published in English magazines, but all failed to win acceptance. By 1906 he was hard pressed. To make matters worse, his brother had sold the family mills and Douglas's share came to very little. In May he returned to England and relieved himself of the financial responsibility of looking after his sons. Not only could he not afford to keep them, but the children, aged seven and three, were a hindrance to his studies and his freedom to travel. So while he did care for them and took a great interest in their lives, a combination of circumstances forced the parting.

1906 was also the year he stopped doing research on Capri. Several explanations have been put forward to explain this sudden termination. The publication of Book of Capri by Harold Trower, the British Consular Agent on Capri, in 1905, may have taken some of the wind out of his sails, since it included much of the material Douglas had intended to publish himself. Money worries forced him to sell his large library, depriving him of research materials, and then too, he may have begun to realize that if he was serious about living from his writing, he would have to appeal to a wider audience.

In July 1906, he had printed in Naples the first of his monographs: Fabio Giordano's Relation of Capri, a heavily annotated text of the five pages devoted to the island in Giordano's Historia Neapolitano, followed closely by Three Monographs: The Lost Literature of Capri, Tiberius and Saracens and Corsairs in Capri. The series included the cynical Life of the Venerable Suor Serafina di Dio and ended in 1907 with Some Antiquarian Notes. The latter's chief interest to the general reader lies in its revelation of the wide variety of topics which fascinated Douglas at the time: brick-stamps, caves, lizards, phallic worship, vases, marble and other building materials, ancient art, etc., etc. In August 1907, he made his first visit to Calabria. Although it only lasted a week, this trip marked the beginning of a life-long love affair with this part of Italy.

Books exhibited include:

Douglas, Norman. Unprofessional Tales. London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1901.

Nerinda. Florence, G. Orioli, 1929.

Fabio Giordano's Relation of Capri. Napoli, L. Pierro, 1906.

Three Monographs. Napoli, L. Pierro, 1906.

Some Antiquarian Notes. Napoli, L. Pierro, 1907.

Trower, Harold. The Book of Capri. Naples, E. Prass, 1906.

CASE III

ENGLAND

Money was always a problem. Even when it was there, there was never enough to live happily, and yet somehow there was always just enough to survive on. When he was really desperate, he would give lessons, and this, according to the diaries he began to keep in 1907, was what kept him going now. But there was still money enough to do some decoration of the house overlooking the Bay of Naples, the last villa he was to own. And he always found time to write, despite money worries and other "fusses".

By 1909, his pieces were at last being accepted by English literary magazines and soon began to appear quite regularly in the English Review and Cornhill Magazine. Still his income was too small and he was forced to come to a decision about the future.

Unwillingly he returned to England, and took up a position as assistant editor of the English Review, secured for him by his old friend, Joseph Conrad. He did not find the work particularly pleasing, but there were highlights; his first book, Siren Land, was finally accepted by a publisher and came out in 1911 under the aegis of J.M. Dent. The book was highly praised, but sold badly. In later years, when his books were being avidly collected, he learned that most of the first run had been pulped. Douglas received only £60 in royalties. His second book, Fountains in the Sand, was the result of a three month trip to Tunisia, taken before his return to England, and was brought out in 1912 by the then young publisher, Martin Secker. The book is noteworthy for several reasons. It contains some of his most beautiful prose passages, but one often feels that Douglas did not love Tunisia as he did the siren land of Italy, nor is there any scholarship involved; rather the reader is sometimes left with the impression that he is reading a report on economic conditions in Tunisia, together with a survey of official and unofficial French attitudes towards the natives. At other times, Douglas does communicate some of the peace and happiness which he found in Tunisia and the reader is taken deep within the author's heart.

The time spent in England had other highlights. He made many new friendships which were to sustain him all his life. Among these new friends were Muriel Draper who wrote about Douglas in Music at Midnight, Faith and Compton Mackenzie, and John Mavrogordato. He was able to spend more time with his children, who were rapidly growing up. Time away from the office was spent in preparing two other books for publication: Old Calabria, which came out in 1915 and London Street Games, in 1916. Old Calabria is generally acknowledged to be a masterpiece of a travel book. Douglas knew Italy well and was able to interpret it accurately. Being full of an insatiable curiosity, he was ever eager to learn more about a place. It was not enough for him to depict in glowing terms the landscape, history, folklore and customs of a region. He had to show more. A good travel writer should, according to Douglas, put himself into the book and this same writer should have a good brain, a philosophy of life worth exploring and the courage to put it to the test. This Douglas had and this is what makes Old Calabria the book it is.

London Street Games is something else entirely. Over a period of years, he collected the rules of hundreds of games played by children in the East End of London, and this "breathless catalogue" is an unbroken listing of these descrip-

tions, usually in the exact words of the children or in an imitation of their speech. This curious little book could find no publisher, so Douglas was forced to publish it himself, with the financial support of Sir Lees Knowles, who was also responsible for the publication of the final two monographs on Capri, Disiecta Membra and The Index, both of which appeared in 1915.

1916 proved to be a disastrous year. Douglas had never really been happy at the English Review, and now relations with the new editor, Austin Harrison, became more strained. Money was again scarce. He reworked several stories from Unprofessional Tales, and even considered selling London Street Games to an American publisher, the very last resort for one who disliked dealing with Americans. The final blow came in November when charges of indecency were laid against him. Early in the New Year, before the trial was to take place, Douglas "evaporated".

Books exhibited include:

A selection of issues of English Review, 1909-1915, which contain: The Angel of Manfredonia, Blind Guides and The Caves of Siren Land.

The London Mercury, May 1921, containing the review of Arabia Deserta.

Douglas, Norman. Siren Land. London, Dent, 1911.

Fountains in the Sand. London, M. Secker, 1912.

Old Calabria. London, M. Secker, 1920.

London Street Games. London, St. Catherine Press, 1916.

Disiecta Membra. London, Dunn & Duncan, printers, 1915.

Index. London, Dunn & Duncan, printers, 1915.

CASE IV

FLORENCE 1917-1922

By February 19, 1917 he was in Florence. His first impressions were not favourable, "I don't much care about the place; never did; I don't like the Tuscan character". But he stayed, working on the proofs of South Wind, which was to be published in June, and meeting more and more of the Bohemian expatriate society of Florence. This was the year of his greatest success. South Wind came out in the middle of a devastating war, and its zest, malicious wit, amoral devotion to fun, explosive laughter and total unconcern with the realities of life were just what was needed. Critics argued about the plot, or lack of it; readers cared less, and revelled in its sunshine.

Sales proved satisfying. Up to August 1918, when the first American edition appeared, 15,500 copies had been sold. After that, sales rocketed, but Douglas reaped none of the benefits; most of the sales were American and he was not protected by copyright - another reason why he disliked dealing with the Americans.

Just before the publication of South Wind, he had begun to wander southwards, and ended up in Rome in August. Here he remet Maurice Magnus, whom he had been able to assist financially several years before. Magnus needed him again, this time in preparing for publication his memoirs of his months in the French Foreign Legion. As it then stood, no publisher would dare issue it. But the work had to be terminated suddenly in October, when Douglas found it prudent to leave Italy for France.

The year in Paris was dreary. The war was still on and food was scarce and expensive, even more so for Douglas, who had very little money and was forced to live off his friends. Mrs. Webb, an old friend from America, would often send him cheques, but for Douglas they came too slowly, were never large enough, and she told him to regard them as loans. And what was the use of borrowing from people who expected to be paid back? So he starved and froze, and when he had had enough, moved to St. Malo. He was not much happier here, but the air and food was better and one felt less the effects of war. He was also able to get back some of the possessions he had left behind in England. This and a good supply of tobacco made him happy for a short time, but soon he was back in Paris, teaching French to American soldiers. This source of income dried up after the Armistice and Douglas was worse off than ever before. He decided that if he had to become a derelict, he would become one in the sun, and so in December 1918, after spending three nights and two and a half days standing up in the train, he descended in Menton, all his possessions in a suitcase and 61 francs in his pocket. Menton's warmth soon made him feel better, as did a commission from the Greek government to write a book on Greece in the style of Old Calabria. The cheque arrived in April and was quickly spent, but Douglas did not see his way clear to leaving for Greece for another year, and when the book was finally written, it was more in the style of a sketch than a Greek version of Old Calabria. He also found an English friend who agreed to send him £20 a month until further notice. All this enabled him to return to the book he had been researching in St. Malo. He had writer's block for the first few months in Menton, but spring brought inspiration and the book based on Breton legends was finally finished that summer.

In the fall he returned to Florence, where he was now to stay, more or less permanently, until 1937. His first task was to try and learn classical Greek and to read all he could on Greece, but his researches were constantly interrupted by the arrivals and departures of friends. D.H. Lawrence came in November, looking for a cheap room. Douglas took care of him until Frieda arrived with funds, introducing him to all the expatriate types Lawrence would sketch so vividly in Aaron's Rod.

The new year brought an offer from Chapman and Hall in London to publish his pseudolegendary novel, which he called Theophilus. But the publishers objected to the title. Nothing seemed suitable until a friend, Ralph Straus, suggested "They Went". Douglas thought it "quite an inspiration", and this was the title eventually used.

That settled, Douglas decided it was now time to go to Greece, but once there he discovered how much more research he would have to do, and was appalled

at the task, not to mention the food. A scant six weeks later, he was back in Florence, ostensibly to write up what he had seen and read. But frustrated by the heat, by the lack of suitable rooms and delays in getting proofs of They Went, he and a companion took off on a two month walking tour. Sometime during this summer, the proofs must have reached Douglas, since the book was published in September. The enthusiasm that had been accorded South Wind was not to be the fate of this latest effort. The critics were pleased, but did not feel that it quite measured up to his earlier work. But reviews were favourable enough that an American publisher offered him £100 advance on an American edition. This, combined with visits from friends, made the fall of 1920 relatively pleasant, until November, when he heard of the death of Magnus, who committed suicide rather than be deported from Malta. Douglas was named literary executor.

1921 began with Douglas developing erysipelas, a skin disease that was to recur and make his last years miserable. But he was considerably cheered by being able to find "two microscopic rooms" which at least allowed him to unpack at last, and begin work on Alone. Published in November of that year, it is the most mellow of all of Douglas's books. It was also the last book he was to write on Italy and had been substantially written just after the first World War. It is full of portraits, friends and people met during his travels and also fictitious personages. Mark Holloway, Douglas's biographer, calls it the "most confiding" of all his works and "the most representative ... containing as it does an almost complete range of his interests and moods and manners, and blending together, fact, fiction, and semi-fiction in a completely satisfying whole". It was also the author's favourite; being the one book of his own he would take along were he forced to spend his remaining years on a desert island.

By February 1922, Douglas was hard at work on yet another book; one he thought would take him about eighteen months to finish. He told friends he wanted to "sit tight and swot all the time and not get drunk more than once a month". But he was not to be left in peace: both his sons had money worries, he had to help a young friend prepare for an English examination, and the erysipelas of the previous year returned. It was a miserable spring. He laid aside the planned novel and began "something else, short and sweet, in the meantime". This was Together, a depiction of two visits to the Vorarlberg, which was published in the fall of 1923.

Books exhibited include:

Douglas, Norman. South Wind. London, M. Secker, 1917.

South Wind. Chicago, Argus Books, 1929.

South Wind. New York, The Modern Library, 1925.

South Wind. London, M. Secker, 1922.

They Went. London, Chapman & Hall, 1920.

Alone. London, Chapman & Hall, 1921.

Together. London, Chapman & Hall, 1923.

CASE V

FLORENCE 1922-1928

The miserable spring of 1922 was lightened by Martin Secker offering to put out a limited edition of South Wind: 150 copies to be signed by the author. Douglas was very enthusiastic, especially when Secker agreed to the revisions Douglas wanted. All past conflicts with Secker were forgotten and the book was quickly produced. Douglas praised it highly, all the corrections had been made and it had been printed on blue paper, just as he wished. It was pronounced "Distinguished".

1923 was the year that Douglas met Giuseppe (Pino) Orioli, one of the most significant events in his life. They were soon inseparable, bound together by similarities; both were insatiably curious, both had a wide knowledge of good food and drink, of literature, both liked their humour Rabelaisian, both liked travelling, and both liked young men. Florence became more pleasant, more people wanted to meet Douglas, who was in turn flattered and frustrated, and began to adopt the practice of using Cook's as his address. But rooms were still hard to find; no sooner had he found a place to live than something happened to make him move out. Finally in the fall of 1923, Orioli found him something suitable; here he was to stay happily for the next three years.

The fall publication of Together aroused a great deal of interest in Douglas. Several English writers felt strongly enough about it to write Douglas, among them E.M. Forster and Lytton Strachey, with whom he was to carry on a correspondence for the next six years. The critics and public were overjoyed at this special kind of travel book in which Douglas explored his own childhood and his years in the Vorarlberg. It is written in a calm manner, by one who is secure in his happiness, and of course it contains all that interested Douglas about the region; its history, geology, folk lore, botany. But there is little about his family, and that in itself is telling.

In 1924, Douglas became established as a "collected" writer. A London bookseller, W. Townley Searle, had written Douglas the previous year, asking for any copies of the Capri monographs he still might have. Douglas bundled up those he had, received a generous amount for them, and a lucrative sideline had begun. Resting from an attack of rheumatism in the Vorarlberg, he got the idea of going into publishing for himself. The Vorarlberg proved to be the wrong spot for exploring this possibility, so the idea was shelved until his return to Florence where he began to prepare something for this publishing venture. Choosing the name Shepherd's Pie as suitable for a collection of reworked old articles and some small fillers, he advertised the book. The response was gratifying, but further work had to be interrupted in order to write and publish D.H. Lawrence and Maurice Magnus, a Plea For Better Manners which was a "pretty juicy" defence of Magnus and also of himself against the caricatures in Lawrence's Aaron's Rod. The attack broadens to condemn Lawrence as a personality monger, one who uses his friends to sell books. Again the response was gratifying. The first printing sold out quickly and went into two more. Douglas found this first venture in publishing a relatively quick and easy way to make money. Not so with Shepherd's Pie. Both in the preparation and in printing there were problems. The name had to be changed several times and finally the book was published under the title Experiments. Many copies were spoiled and he lamented the loss of profits, but he cleared enough to enable him to visit Africa for two months.

Arriving back in Florence in late July, he was cheered to find a large cheque waiting for him from Abraham Rosenbach, an American who had bought his collection of books and letters by Conrad. He longed to flee the heat, but had to find rooms again. This time he had better luck; Orioli helped him find a flat he could buy and so prevent the endless unheavals. By early 1926 he was established. The leisure time of the previous months he had filled with making notes on the fauna of the Greek Anthology, but now found it necessary to have someone to assist with the texts. Edward Hutton agreed to help, and together they travelled to Greece for further research. Douglas was a little pessimistic about this work, all his other efforts on the subject having failed. But all seemed to go well and Birds and Beasts of the Greek Anthology was published in September 1927. He had been right to be pessimistic. It was a flop. But that concerned Douglas very little. He was well on the way to finishing In the Beginning, and despite the Birds and Beasts disaster, subscriptions for the new book poured in, and Douglas was able to cover all his expenses before publication. In the Beginning is Douglas's final fairy tale about human behaviour and can be read as an allegory of the ages of man, or the rise and fall of a civilization. It is Douglas at his best, with scenes reminiscent of the pastoral Greece of the myths; and Douglas at his worst, with one debauchery scene that was described by Edward Garnett as "pure Gorgonzola". Douglas delighted in that description.

Nancy Cunard, whom Douglas had met in 1923, had finally realized a life-long ambition when she was able to purchase a hand press and other equipment from a defunct printing house, and as her first item, decided to print a facsimile of Douglas's 1895 Report on the Pumice Stone Industry. But there were many problems, and these along with worries about his teeth, a trip to the ruins of Baalbek, work on a novel called Love Among the Ruins that was never to be finished, on a book of limericks and on another book about aphrodisiacs, made 1928 pass quickly.

Books exhibited include:

Douglas, Norman. D.H. Lawrence and Maurice Magnus. Florence, Priv. print., 1924.

Experiments. Florence, Priv. print., 1925.

Birds and Beasts of the Greek Anthology. Florence, Priv. print., 1927.

In the Beginning. Florence, Priv. print., 1927.

Report on the Pumice Stone Industry of the Lipari Islands. Reprinted in France by Nancy Cunard at the author's request, 1928.

CASE VI

FLORENCE 1928-1929

His money-making ventures took precedence over original work; activity was fragmented and frantic, as if he feared he was running out of time and energy. Some Limericks was published in December, after having been advertised by Douglas as "extremely obscene and blasphemous, one of the filthiest books in the English language". Soon after publication, the book appeared in many pirated editions, and trying to track down all issues has daunted even the most fervent bibliographer.

The limericks may be obscene, but the scholar-like notes are dry, ironical and could not have been better done. While some adored the book, others found it a very sad way for someone of Douglas's talents to make money and the whole venture dreadfully unfunny.

The next book How About Europe? was well under way by the time the Limericks came out and was finished by August 1929. It is a sort of scrapbook of opinions and statistics, prejudices and memories prompted by Katherine Mayo's Mother India (London, J. Cape, 1927) which Douglas found "sad and unpleasant". Correspondence during this period shows Douglas lamenting his loss of energy, but he was still capable of producing a steady stream of work. He found time to rework the short story Nerinda from the long-ago joint effort Unprofessional Tales to make it the first book published by Orioli. It was well received by the bibliophiles and he decided to have Orioli reprint all the Capri monographs. Reworking them and revising the proofs took Douglas until the end of 1929, and in his few spare moments he worked on an introduction to a cookery book.

Despite all the problems attendant on her reproduction of the Report on the Pumice Stone Industry (1928), Nancy Cunard was not totally disheartened and summoned up enough courage to print another of Douglas's works. In July 1929 the fledgling printer issued One Day. This was the book that the Greek government had commissioned from Douglas many years before, and now it finally appeared: ten years late.

Books exhibited include:

Douglas, Norman. Some Limericks. Philadelphia, Priv. print., 1928 i.e. 1931.

Some Limericks. Boston, Nicholson and Whitney, 1942.

Some Limericks. New York, Grove Press, 1967.

The Norman Douglas Limerick Book. London, A. Blond, 1967.

How about Europe? Florence, Priv. print., 1929.

One Day. Chapelle-Réanville, Eure, Hours Press, 1929.

CASE VII

FLORENCE 1930-1937

Orioli's edition of the Capri materials was issued in July 1930, one of the largest volumes ever to be published in English in Italy. As soon as all were distributed, Douglas and Pino took off on a walking trip, the latter keeping diaries of this expedition which were to form the basis of two books (Moving Along and Adventures of a Bookseller).

Upon their return, Douglas went to work on the introduction to the long-planned cookery book. It took more time and more research than he had envisaged, so he decided to make it an essay and offer it to Orioli. Paneros became no. 5 in the Lungarno series. The following year it was republished in a commercial edition. This essay contains Douglas's philosophy of love and to some extent of life, told in a relaxed and slightly ironical manner.

Douglas was now sixty-three and very conscious of that fact. Now was the time for his memoirs. He was well enough off to take the time and the mood was right. He enjoyed preparing Looking Back, which was completed early in 1932. It is a bold book, and he does not spare himself, but it is a charming one; the notion of using visiting cards as an aide-memoire was admirably suited to his purpose. The book was a great success.

The early thirties in Florence flew by. He was not always well, and his correspondence increasingly reflected his growing concern over his illnesses, unstable financial situation and the new menace of Mussolini and Hitler. None of these stopped him from travelling. There were trips to the Vorarlberg with Orioli or other companions, a long stay in India and Ceylon in 1935 and, of course, trips back to his siren land. In 1937 there was some unpleasantness with the police - about a little girl whom he had taken under his protection - and once more he was forced to leave town suddenly. This time it had to be done so quickly that he was only able to take a rucksack with him; he left with the knowledge that he might never be able to return.

Books exhibited include:

Douglas, Norman. Capri: Materials for a Description of the Island. Florence, G. Orioli, 1930.

Paneros. Florence, G. Orioli, 1930.

Looking Back. London, Chatto and Windus, 1933.

Summer Islands. New York, Colophon, 1931.

Summer Islands. London, D. Harmsworth, 1931.

Summer Islands. London, Corvinus Press, 1942.

CASE VIII

The War - and after

He stayed in the South of France until 1941, living as best he could, quite quietly. He and Nancy Cunard made one trip to Tunisia, which was not a success, but did nothing to diminish their long-standing friendship. Other friends also came to visit, and life, on the whole, was not bad. Then war came and he was rather alone. When France fell, no news was heard of him until, suddenly in February 1941, he turned up in Lisbon. In Portugal, relatively untouched by war, Douglas was able to recover from the privations he had suffered in France, but he had aged greatly, and recovery was slow. He was also "fussed" about his stay in Portugal. His permit had expired and he dreaded being sent back to England, not because of his legal position there, but because he so much disliked the food and climate. He needed the warmth of the Mediterranean. But when Orioli, who had been in Lisbon since 1939, suddenly died on the 2nd of January, 1942, all the fight seemed to go out of Douglas and, on the 11th of January, he found himself on a plane bound for London.

The war years in England were no more pleasant for Douglas than they were for anyone who had to live through them, though the friendship with Nancy Cunard made up for much. But he still dreamed of getting back to France or Italy - somehow. In March 1946 he applied to the Italian Embassy for an entrance permit. It was granted when he told the official that he wanted to go there to die. By June he was in Rome, shortly thereafter in Naples. His finances were as low as ever. His book, Late Harvest, had been published in October, but he was unhappy with its appearance. The winter was cold and he was "fussed". In April of the following year, Kenneth Macpherson, an old friend, came to Italy and installed Douglas in his villa. This kindness was heaven-sent. He was becoming more and more frail. He would not stop writing however, producing an article on Milton and A Footnote on Capri which was published posthumously. He was still able to travel, making short trips to neighbouring areas. Then, in 1950, his erysipelas recurred, and he now had to admit he was an invalid. But the invalid was still able in November 1951 to sign a contract for the publication of the aphrodisiac cookbook, Venus in the Kitchen. Soon after, he became bedridden, and on February 7, 1952, tormented by his skin disease and other ills, he took an overdose of sleeping pills.

Books exhibited include:

Douglas, Norman. An Almanac. Lisbon, Priv. print., 1941.

An Almanac. London, Chatto & Windus, 1945.

Late Harvest. London, L. Drummond, 1946.

Footnote on Capri. London, Sidgwick and Jackson, 1952.

Venus in the Kitchen. London, W. Heinemann, 1952.

This exhibition is continued in the Reading Rooms, where a selection of books from G. Orioli's Lungarno series are on display, as well as books in which Norman Douglas is portrayed.